

“THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION”
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A SERMON
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“And hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.”
2 Corinthians 5:18

THERE has been a long standing quarrel between God and man. It commenced in that day when our first parents hearkened to the serpent’s voice, and believed the devil rather than their Maker. Yet God is not willing for that quarrel to continue. According to the goodness of His nature, He delights in love. He is the God of peace, and He has, on His part, prepared everything that is needful for a perfect reconciliation. His glorious wisdom has devised a plan whereby, without violating His justice as the Judge of all the earth, and without tarnishing His perfect holiness, He can meet man upon the ground of mercy, and man can again become the friend of God.

That blessed work was done long ago, and now, all that remains is that man should be reconciled to God, that he should be willing to end the dispute, and that his heart should turn towards his Maker again in love, and peace, and perfect reconciliation. He bids us, His ministers, and indeed, all His servants—each according to his opportunity, and experience, and knowledge, and ability and grace—to go abroad among the sons of men and exercise “the ministry of reconciliation,”—to labor to bring men into harmony with God, that they may be willing to accept what God has done toward the making of an everlasting peace and ending, once for all, this grievous quarrel.

You notice, dear friends, that Paul says that God “hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation,”—that is, to us men. He might have sent angels to you with the Gospel, but for a thousand reasons, it was preferable that He should send to men by men. You observe also how the apostle reassures us by this message, for if there were a war between two countries, as for instance, suppose our country should unhappily be at war with France, it would be a token that we desired peace if the ambassador whom we sent to France was a Frenchman who had become domiciled among us.

It would be a sure sign that the French sought to be at peace with us if they said to an Englishman living in Paris, “Go to London, and try to make peace between the two nations.” It would be a token at once that the desire for peace was sincere, and you may be sure that God earnestly desires that there should be peace between you and Himself, because He sends men to you with “the word of reconciliation.” This shows His condescension too—in that He veils His glorious majesty.

A seraph would be far more worthy than I am to stand here to plead with you, and willingly enough would I resign my place to him. I do not know that an archangel could desire a happier or better work than to stand here, and speak on behalf of the God of the whole earth, and labor to bring back God’s rebellious children to Him, but while his splendor might reveal much of the greatness of God to you, yet you might be terrified and alarmed by the angelic preacher, but now, the human being who addresses you, being just like yourselves, shows how God lays aside His glory, and holds back the thunder of His power, that He may come and reason with you face to face as a man reasons with his friend.

He “hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” because we can, in this matter, speak from experience. When we talk about being at peace with God, and speak of the joy which this reconciliation brings, we can say, “We know it is so, for we have felt it.” We can enter, with full sympathy, into the case of our friends who are still unreconciled to God. We know the evil of sin, and the fear it creates in the conscience, for we have felt it ourselves.

We can therefore, be tender and compassionate to others who are in a similar condition. And we also know something of the sweetness of peace with God through Jesus Christ, for we are living in the enjoyment of it. We know too, what are the struggles of a poor soul seeking to get that peace, for we struggled into peace through the rich mercy of God. I hope, therefore, that you will see the wisdom and the grace of God in choosing one like yourself to plead with you on His behalf, and that God will be pleased to bless that instrumentality, and make it effectual in your reconciliation unto Himself.

Notice particularly that the ministers of God are not sent to reconcile God to you. That great work is already done. As the righteous Judge, He was angry with all sin, but now, seeing that an acceptable sacrifice has been presented, He is able to meet you with forgiveness in His heart. We are not even sent to find out a way of reconciling you to God, for He “hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” as well as “the ministry of reconciliation,” so that all we have to do is, as it were, to translate into today’s language that which God Himself has written in this Book.

We have to speak out in simple, earnest, living words, the message which has been dictated to us—not to make up a message, but to act as the mouthpiece of God. Oh, that He might make me that to many a heart here now!

Now let us go to this solemn work, and may God the Holy Spirit help us in it! First then, we wish to *state the objective of true Gospel ministry*. Next, we will *declare the word of reconciliation*, and then, we will *beseech you to agree with it*. God grant that these points may strike home!

I. First then, let us inquire—WHAT IS THE OBJECTIVE OF TRUE GOSPEL MINISTRY? It is that men should be reconciled to God.

My unconverted hearer, you are at enmity against God. I know that you do not always believe that. You say, “I have not yielded my heart to Him, but still, I am not at enmity against Him.” Listen. You do that which displeases Him, and you do it without any grief over it, or whatever compunction you may feel for a time, you do the same thing again and again, and you continue to do it.

What does this prove? When a subject constantly rebels against his sovereign, does it not prove that he is disloyal at heart? “By their fruits ye shall know them,” is our Lord’s own test. Look, you unconverted ones, see what your fruits are, do not your wicked works prove that you are at enmity against God?

Is it not certain that you do not like to hear much about Him? Am I speaking untruly when I say that you count the Bible very dull reading—that some of you say that Sabbaths spent as Christians ought to spend them are very dreary days? You want something more cheerful, God’s house is too weary a place for you, and to think about Him is too much of a task.

I put it to your conscience whether it is not so with you. Do you not regard religion as being a very gloomy affair? If you wanted what you call, pleasure, would you think of seeking it in drawing near to God? No, you would be happier if there were no God at all, would you not? And if all the arrangements of divine justice, by which God governs the world, should be abolished, would you not be pleased? If you could sin without being checked in it, or threatened with punishment for it, would you not be glad?

All this proves that you do not love God, the real English of it is that you would destroy God, if you could, in order to have liberty to act according to your own devices. You do not find pleasure in Him, you must admit that your pleasure is found elsewhere. But when we truly love a person, we find pleasure in being in his company, we are glad to receive letters from him, in fact, anything that the hand of the loved one has touched becomes interesting or even sacred to us.

Seeing that it is not so with you, but that you have said to God, “Depart from me, I desire not the knowledge of Thy ways,” does not this prove that your heart is at enmity against God? Ah, young people! you may scarcely think that this accusation is a just one, but the more you come to search and look, the more you will find that it is true. If it is not true, I am indeed glad that I need not ask you to be reconciled to God, for you are reconciled already.

But then, we shall need to see the proofs that it is so, and among the rest, we shall want to see whether you love God’s Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and trust in Him, for “He that loveth him

that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.” If you love the Father, you will love the Son, and put your soul’s trust in Him. But it is not so with unrenewed men, they are at enmity against God.

Our objective, in all our preaching, is that you should really be reconciled to God—not that you should feign to be so. “Oh, yes!” say you, “we will attend the regular services. If you wish it, we will join the church, we will be baptized, or we will be confirmed, and we will take the sacrament.” That is not sufficient, God wants the love of your heart, He wants you to be at peace with Him.

Suppose you were to attend to all these external things, and still did not love and trust Him, you would rather be insulting Him than honoring Him. I tell you, all your church goings, and your chapel goings, your saying of your prayers, and your reading of the Bible, are of no value in His sight unless your heart is right with Him. That is the point we are aiming at. In vain is all your attendance upon outward worship, in vain is your profession of being reconciled to God unless you really are so.

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, or else the work of the minister is not even begun, much less completed. We can never be satisfied with your merely listening to us. It is a great thing to have a large and attentive congregation, but it only makes us mourn if we even imagine that you give your ear to us, and not to our Master—if you say, “He speaks pleasantly,” or “He speaks well,” and yet obey not the message we have tried to convey to you.

Oh! forget us, think nothing of us, reproach us, if you will, there is good reason for it sometimes, but do turn unto the Lord our God! “Be ye reconciled unto him,” that is the burden of all our preaching, and therefore, we cannot be put off with your saying that you will be reconciled to God one of these days. We do not preach with a view to getting you to promise to be reconciled someday, but we beseech you to be reconciled now. “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” Those are not my words, they are the words of inspired Scripture itself.

Now, then—we have nothing to do with tomorrow. It is now, even now, that we beseech you, in Christ’s stead, to be reconciled to God, and we want that reconciliation to be wrought at once by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thus I have stated the objective of true Gospel ministry.

II. Now secondly, I want to make known to you, as plainly as I can, “THE WORD OF RECONCILIATION.” What is that word?

First, I have to tell you that “*all things are of God.*” That is the first sentence of the verse from which our text is taken. If, therefore, you are willing to be at peace with God, there is nothing whatsoever wanted from you. God has prepared all things that are needed for this present and perpetual reconciliation. To make the friendship between God and man firm and lasting, all that is needed has been already supplied.

There is to be nothing of your will, nothing of your merits, nothing of your doing, nothing of your suffering, but “all things are of God.” I think I hear one say, “That suits me, then, for I have nothing, and I can do nothing.” You need not be anything, soul. It will be better if you can be nothing, and still better if you can be less than nothing, “for all things are of God.” That is where “the ministry of reconciliation” begins. Surely, such a message as that ought to help bring men into peace with God.

And next, I again remind you that *the reconciling work, on God’s part, is already done.* He “hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation,” but He “reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ.” When Jesus hung upon the cross—when Jesus died—when Jesus rose again, everything was done that was necessary in order that God might be able to forgive the guilty, and receive them to His bosom. Nothing can be added to Christ’s completed work, of which He said, “It is finished.” It is as efficacious today as it ever was. The work of salvation was done forever, and on God’s part, there is nothing now to be removed in order that all who trust His Son may be at perfect peace with Him.

The Lord, through the apostle’s words, *graciously deigns to explain how this came about.* He says that He “was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” Do you see what that means? You are full of sin, but God will not set that sin down to your account if you

trust in His Son’s sacrifice. You have lived a life of sin, but He will not impute it to you. Perhaps you ask, “How can that ever be?” I will tell you directly, but first, I ask you to believe that it is so.

“Not imputing their trespasses unto them.” You are in debt, you owe a great sum that you can never pay, but the person to whom you owe it turns to his account book, and he says, “I have nothing down against you, are you not delighted that it is so?” “But I am in your debt.” “I have nothing down against you,” says he again. He knows all about the debt, yet he tells you that.

“But it must go down somewhere,” say you, “that man has set my debt down to the account of somebody else.” That is exactly the case with your sin. Read the last verse of the chapter, and you will get the explanation, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

Jesus willingly undertook to stand in the sinner’s place, and if you accept the reconciliation He has made, your debts are put down beneath His name, and through them all is drawn the red mark of His atoning sacrifice, canceling them every one, so that God can say, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins.”

You see, then, that God meets you on these terms—that, whatever your guilt may be, He lays it at the door of Christ, and makes Him to be sin for you, and then, He puts you into Christ’s place, and makes you to be “the righteousness of God in him,” and so He saves you. “That is an extraordinary plan,” say you. It is, it is extraordinary. It wakes the echoes of heaven every time the angels think of it, but it is God’s plan.

Will you have it? What say you to it? Will you cavil at it, or will you accept it? Do not let its wonderful character keep you back from it. On the contrary, say, “If God is satisfied with it, I may well be satisfied too. If God is content with the work of Christ, I am sure I well may be. It is to Him that the debt was due, and if He says it is discharged, I believe Him!” If He declares, as He does, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus”—if He teaches His people to say, as He does, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God”—we are glad enough to accept the truth He reveals, and I, for one, am glad enough to tell it out to you.

I have known the time when I could almost have leaped out of the pew when I first learned this simple way of salvation, it did something more than electrify me when I came to understand that this was the way in which God was just, and yet the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus, and that all that I had to do was simply to accept it—to look to Christ, and take Him to be my Substitute—to trust my soul in His dear pierced hands, and so to be at peace with God through Him. That was what I did, and so I obtained peace in believing.

Many years have passed since then, but I have never sought for any other confidence, nor do I want any other. Jesus is all in all to my heart at this moment, and therefore, I urge all here present to accept Him. Let every guilty, burdened, heavy laden sinner come, and take Christ, who is the power of God, and the wisdom of God, saying, “If God meets me thus, and is willing to blot out all the past, and let me begin over again—if He is willing to cast my sins into the depths of the sea, and never call me to account for them, and never lay them to my charge—blessed be His holy name, it does not take me two minutes to consider whether I shall accept this reconciliation or not, I will have it, and rejoice to have it. May He grant it to me now!”

III. My third point is this. We are not to be satisfied merely to tell you the Gospel, WE ARE TO BESEECH YOU TO ACCEPT IT, “as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

Consider, I pray you, *how unseemly it is for you to be at enmity against your God*. You are a creature whom He has made, and you could not exist a single moment longer if it were not for the constant emanation of His power, which sustains you in being. You owe everything to Him, you are absolutely in His hand, He can create, and He can destroy. A moth beneath your finger would not be one half as easy to crush as you are beneath the finger of God if He becomes angry with you. Is it wise, is it right, for the creature to be at war with the omnipotent Creator?

Remember too, *what a good God He is!* He makes the sun to rise on the evil as well as on the good. The rain falls upon the lands of the blasphemer as well as upon the fields of the devout. God gives us fruitful seasons—yea, He gives us everything, and He is not provoked against us even though we have continued to rebel against Him. For which of these things do you sin against Him?

As I have studied God’s character, and known something of Him by fellowship, I have bowed before His matchless goodness. Oh, it is indeed evil to do anything against One who is pure love—who is “holy, holy, holy,” altogether without fault! It cannot be right—I put it to your conscience—it cannot be right for you to be at enmity against the pure and holy God. Think of this matter, I pray you, and end your enmity.

If you are not at peace with God, *you ought to rejoice at any plan by which you may be at peace.* I say, *any* plan. I would take the Bible, if I had never opened it before, and say, “Whatever I find between the covers of this Book of God, I will gratefully accept. I do not mind what plan He proposes, so long as this sad state of things shall come to an end. Can God forgive me? Can He receive me into amity with Himself? Can I be His accepted child? Whatever He proposes, I will agree to accept it even before I know what it is.”

But how much more ought you to accept it when the plan is what I have explained to you, namely, one in which there is nothing but mercy on God’s part, though there is nothing but sin on yours—one in which God, in the person of His Son, takes all the suffering, and you have all the blessing—one in which Jesus takes all the shame, and you take all the joy.

And mark you, *this is to be had for the asking.* You have but truly to seek it, and you shall have it. Forsake your sin, forsake your evil thoughts, confess your transgressions to the Lord, and come and trust in Him whom God hath set forth to be the propitiation for human sin. That is all that is required, why do you not accept it? Surely, it is because sin has maddened you, and so fascinated you as to make you slaves to its accursed self, so that you do not turn unto Him even though the way of salvation is so simple, so easy, so sure, so everlasting.

I would that I could put a force into the very tones of my voice that would send home this reasoning to your heart. As God’s creature, you ought to be at peace with Him. Any way in which reconciliation could reach you, you ought to be glad to accept, but such a way as this, in which God’s justice is honored, and yet His mercy is revealed, ought to strike you as being full of divine wisdom, and you should at once accept it. Oh, that you would do so!

Let me further plead with you to be reconciled to God *because the consequences of not being reconciled to Him will be very terrible.* What king is there who, if he were about to go to war, and found himself able to raise only a thousand troops, would not stop a while if he found that his adversary were coming to meet him with a million men? “Oh!” says he, “this is too preposterous, my little army could not stand in the field for an hour against my adversary’s vast host. The very first discharge of his dread artillery would sweep both myself and all my little company away.”

But the contrast is still greater in your case, because you are not, with respect to God, even as strong as a thousand would be against a million. He could devour you as easily and as swiftly as the fire devours the stubble. Let the wax fight with the flame, or the tow contend with the fire, before you shall be so foolish as to attempt to contend with God. Throughout your life He proposes to you terms of peace, but there will come a day when He will have no dealings with you through ambassadors, but He will deal with you by executioners.

I think that it was Alexander who, when he besieged a town, would hang out a white flag, and at night a lamp of white color, and as long as either of them hung out, it was a token that if the besieged surrendered, they should have the best possible terms. But when he hung out the red flag, or the red lamp, the people knew that every man in that city would be put to the sword. Alexander would offer no terms then. He had hung out the white signal long enough, and now he had changed his tone.

So, all through this life, the white flag is held out to you, but the time will come when, instead thereof, there will be the red flag of vengeance, and woe be unto the ungodly in that day! Modern

deceivers may tell you what they like, but God’s Word declares, “These shall go away into everlasting punishment,” and side by side with it, as if to confirm it, is the other declaration that the righteous shall go into life eternal or everlasting—indicating, by the selfsame word, which is used concerning the righteous, that they shall reign forever and ever, that the doom of the wicked shall be just as lasting. “The smoke of their torment goeth up for ever and ever.” If one is to be shortened, the other must be, and I cannot, even with all the pity in my heart, shorten the torments of hell at the expense of the bliss of heaven, nor will God do so either. Oh, provoke not the wrath of the Most High, but be at peace with Him this very hour!

Think too, of *the consequences which will follow when you have peace with God*, for the man, who is at peace with God, and knows it, is the happiest of men. He is at peace with all things, he is at peace with life, and death, and time, and eternity. The very beasts of the field are in league with him, and the stars in their courses fight for him. All things work for his good now that he has become a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

Oh, the joy that some of us have experienced through entering into peace with God! We could not describe it to you. Sometimes, it has been so exhilarating that we have felt that we could not communicate any adequate sense of it to our fellow men, for we have heard words which it would not be lawful for a man to utter, save in the ears of those who have felt the same supreme delights.

That blessed Book of Solomon’s Song is misunderstood by many believers because they never knew the joy of conjugal love with Christ, and the sweetness of His heart when He lays it bare to His beloved people. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him,” and I can assure you, beloved, that if you do but become reconciled to God, it will be the best day that you ever spent.

Let me continue pleading with you for a little longer. Do you not know, dear friends, that *the first person to seek peace in any quarrel should be the offending party*? It is not often that it is so, but it ought to be so. The person, who has offended another, ought to be the first to seek terms of peace. Now you are that person. Come, then, accept the embassy of love which God sends to you.

That I may come very close to you, let me ask, “Have you anything to say against God?” In all earthly quarrels, there are two sides, but it is not so in this case. Is there anything which the Lord has done that you think to be hard? For instance, is there anything in the terms of peace that He puts before you that you think to be too stern?

“Oh!” say you, “His requirements are too strict.” What are those requirements? That you should leave your sin? That is not too much to ask of you. Does not every doctor, who wants to heal a sick man who has taken poison, first of all prevent him from taking any more? Sin is poison to you. Would you let your child, who has made himself ill by eating some unsuitable thing, keep on eating it? No, you would take it away from him. That is all that God wishes to do to you—to deny to you that which, if you were wise, you would deny to yourself. This is not a hard thing, surely.

“Oh! but what He asks of me is so mysterious, I do not comprehend it.” What is it that you do not comprehend? That you should believe on Jesus Christ? That is as simple as the act of breathing. That you should trust yourself to Christ? “Where is He?” say you. He is in heaven, but He is just as able to save you as if He stood here in bodily presence. Do you not often trust people whom you never see?

Some of you have business transactions with people in India, or you trust your money to a banker in Australia, or in America. You never saw the banker, and you do not want to see him. You believe that there is such a person, and you trust your money to him. Trust your soul to Christ in the same fashion. Though you never saw Him, rely upon Him, for you have read about Him, and you believe the story of His birth, and life, and death, and Resurrection.

“Ah!” says one, “but if I were to become religious, I would lose so many pleasures.” I see, but in order to be reconciled to God, I would be willing, if necessary, to lose a thousand pleasures! Do you not feel that if there were some amusement that you loved, that grieved your mother, you would give it up? Husband, if there were something that you did that made the tears stand in your wife’s eye, even though you liked to do it, would you not give it up for her sake?

For those we love, we can readily deny ourselves, and count it no denial. But after all, you know that it is not so. God asks us to give up no pleasure that is real pleasure, and if there be any pleasure at all in sin, He takes care to give us ten times as much pleasure in His own holy ways. If it were right, I could speak of some here who have known all about the pleasures of the world. They know the pleasures of horseracing, they know the pleasures of the gayest company that can be, but I know what their testimony would be if I asked them. They would say that an hour of peace with God not only recompenses them for the loss of those pleasures, but that they are glad to get rid of all such rubbish, the things whereof they are now ashamed.

I do not know how merry a young fellow you may be, but if you are happier than I am, young man, you must be an uncommonly happy person. I can pick out some, who are much older than I am, and who have more rheumatism in their bones than I have, and who also have a good deal of poverty to endure, I could bring you many an old woman, who is sitting here, and I could ask her, “Would you change places with that young man who is given up to the guilty pleasures of sin? Come, old Mary, what do you say? This young man says that he would lose pleasure if he were to become a Christian, what do you say? Would you change places with him?” I think I hear her say—

*“I would not change my blest estate
For all the world calls good or great,
And while my faith can keep her hold
I envy not the sinner’s gold.”*

So, young man, you see that we are as happy as you are. We may not make so much noise over it sometimes, but “still waters run deep,” and the quiet joy of the Christian is joy that is worth having.

“Oh, but!” says another, “this is my difficulty. I am afraid God would not receive me, even if I were to come to Him.” Just give me your hand, brother, let me have a grip of it. Now, if I were to assure you that I would receive you into my house, would you believe me? I believe you would. Well, you may doubt me if you like, but you must not doubt my God, or doubt the bleeding Lamb, and He has said, “Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.” He could not put it stronger than that. For no reason, and in no way, will He cast out any soul that comes to Him, so He will not cast you out.

But I hear another say, “I have tried and failed.” What have you tried? Have you accepted Christ as the propitiation for your sin? Have you trusted yourself with Christ? Do you say, “Yes”? Then you are a saved man, God declares that you are.

“But I have prayed,” say you. Yes, but that is not the way of salvation. God forbid that I should say a word against prayer! I would say a thousand words for it, it is a blessed exercise, but the dead cannot pray, nor can you till you are made alive. The first thing that you have to do is to trust Jesus Christ, and that is the only thing which the Gospel demands of you as the grand condition of reconciliation with God. “This is the work of God, that ye believe on Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.”

“Yes, but I have tried to lead a different life.” I know that you have, but suppose I were a physician, and I said to you, “There is the medicine that will cure you,” and you say, “I will not take it, sir.” “Why not?” “Because I have tried some other medicine in vain.” Would that be logical? The doctor might say, “You may have tried fifty sorts of medicine, but that has nothing to do with what I am giving you, you have to try this.”

It must not be your way of being saved, but God’s way. Your way is to try and live better. But then you do not live better, for you break down again and again. God’s way of saving you is that you trust Jesus Christ, and then He will make you live better, old things shall pass away, and all things shall become new when Jesus Christ has you in His hands. Have done with yourself, and let Jesus Christ do the whole work, and He will save you. That is God’s way of salvation.

I do not know whether I have mentioned the peculiar quibble or quarrel that any heart has with God, but I hope I have done so. I would willingly lay down my very life if I could bring all in this Tabernacle

to the Lord Jesus Christ. We preachers, and you teachers in the Sunday school, and you who try to talk privately with individuals—we ought all to be very earnest with them, for this is very solemn work. They are apt to die at any moment, and to die, too, without hope. Let us plead earnestly with them for God’s sake.

It does seem so sad that a good God should have so many millions of His creatures as His enemies—that He, who keeps the very breath in their nostrils, should get no return from them but ingratitude. “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib,” says God, “but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.” O God, for Thy dear sake, we would bring men into reconciliation with Thee if we could!

We must also be in earnest for Christ’s sake, for Christ died for them, He died to save sinners. He had no subordinate aim, this was the one passion of His soul. “He saved others,” “Himself he could not save.” Oh, by the wounds of Jesus, the scars of which are still visible above, be reconciled to God! Trample not upon His precious blood.

We would be earnest with you also for your own sakes. In a short time, you will be on a sick bed, and you will be on the brink of the grave. We pray you, ere the death-sweat stands in great beads upon your brow, seek peace with God. Ere yet they that gather about your bed whisper to one another, “He is going,” oh, be at peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is our peace, and who reconciles us to the Most High!

And I would be in earnest, last of all—and have my brethren and sisters in earnest too—for our own sakes. “That sounds like selfishness,” says someone. If so, it is a hallowed selfishness. As surely as I am a living man, I have to give an account of this night’s work before the judgment seat of God, and every Christian worker, and especially, the Christian minister, will have to answer for it whether he declared the truth, and declared it with an earnest spirit.

I think, sometimes, that it will be the greatest mercy that God ever gave to mortal man if I am able to say, at the last, what George Fox, the Quaker, said just as he died, “I am clear, I am clear, I am clear.” Brother minister, if you and I, at the last, are clear of the blood of all men, we will lift up an everlasting song of gratitude to our Lord and Master who made us faithful to our charge.

We dare not think of standing before Christ’s bar if we have not been in earnest with you. It is as much as our souls are worth to trifle with you—to gather you together on a Sabbath evening, to try and tickle you with fine words, or pretty anecdotes, or mere excitement. This will never do.

Souls, you will either be lost or saved, you will be in hell among the damned or in heaven among the blessed, and that very shortly, and if the watchman warns you not, your blood will be required at the watchman’s hand. That we may be able to give in our account with joy, “be ye reconciled to God.” That we may be able to say, “Here we are, Lord, and the children Thou hast given us through our ministry,” “be ye reconciled to God.”

Dear young people, and you aged folk, who soon must go, and you in middle life, “be ye reconciled to God.” “As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” God reconcile you to Himself, for His dear Son’s sake!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

2 CORINTHIANS 5:9-21

Verses 9-11. *Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your conscience.*

The outside world did not understand the preachers of the Gospel, they thought them dreamy enthusiasts, earnest about nothing at all. But Paul says that God understood him, and he hoped too, that the consciences of those to whom he was writing had also understood him. The truly faithful minister of Jesus Christ may know that there are two approvals that he will be sure to get—the approval of his Master, and the approval of men’s consciences. Their prejudice may condemn him, his mode of oratory may not suit their fancy, but their conscience must give quite a different verdict, it must approve the faithful preaching of the Gospel.

12-13. *For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart. For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause.*

Happy Paul who, as a preacher of the Gospel, could write, “If you say that we are beside ourselves, that we are really mad upon religious matters—well, it is to God that we are so.” It is not every madman who can say that. “Or if you tell us that we are too serious and sober, it is your case, your cause, that makes us so.” Well may we be sober and solemn when we think of the danger in which men’s souls continually are.

14-15. *For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.*

The true-hearted Christian judges himself to have died when Christ died, and henceforth, he feels that he must not live for any objective but the glory of Christ.

16. *Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.*

He is gone back to glory, so our objective is not to win a kingdom for Him anywhere upon earth. Our aim now is spiritual, the proclamation of His truth—the winning of a kingdom for Him in the hearts of men.

17-19. *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.*

The work of reconciliation He committed to His Son, the word of reconciliation He has committed to us. It is our high privilege to tell the tidings of the wondrous work by which God is reconciled, so that, without any violation of His justice, He can have mercy upon those who have offended against Him.

20. *Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.*

As if Christ Himself stood here, and pleaded with you, He bids His ministers plead on His behalf. In the name of God, He bids us beseech you to be reconciled to God. Ambassadors do not generally beseech men, they stand on their dignity, they make demands for the honor of their sovereign, but Christ’s ambassadors know of no dignity which should keep them from pleading with men.

21. *For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.